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THE WORK AND SERVICE OF THE FACTORY NURSE IN MANUFACTURING PLANTS

BY NATHALIE C. RUDD.¹

While any manufacturer who has established in his plant a welfare service or nursing department (the title is immaterial) will tell you that he "wants to feel that his people are cared for," this is but the expression on his part of the general attitude of managers nowadays that they wish to get at the mind of the people—to learn the underlying causes of industrial dissatisfaction. It seldom shows a knowledge of real conditions and needs. They have come to realize that a better mutual understanding must come about between employer and employee.

I think that the nurse, perhaps better than any other woman worker, placed in the midst of a body of working people, can offer the keynote for the betterment of conditions and the furtherance of harmony.

Hospital training alone will not have given a woman the ability to serve in this capacity; but where that vast opportunity for studying human nature at its frailest has been used to widen the sympathies—to "get the response" from all classes and conditions of people; and where it is added to a natural democratic spirit, an appreciation of the business viewpoint and an executive ability (in fact, the right personality) the nurse in her professional capacity has a wide sphere of usefulness before her in industry. Her qualifications might be tabulated as follows:

- a. Has human sympathy and wins confidence
- b. Has help to offer by remedies or advice
- c. Has learned the value and dignity of *work*
- d. Knows the necessity of cheerfulness, unselfishness and enthusiasm in daily intercourse
- e. Is accustomed to look for symptoms as a means of diagnosis, and naturally uses this faculty in looking for causes that have produced certain effects

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A SCHEDULE OF WORK VALUABLE

I believe that every nurse now engaged in industrial work was attracted by the thought of a new and great field of service, where wonderful reforms could be achieved. Where she has failed or lost courage it has been due to one of two reasons—either because the lure of the easier hours and the steadier salary than that accompanying general nurses' work has sapped her enthusiasms and weakened her efforts; or because the problems arising in the industrial world were so many, so conflicting, so apparently without solution, that she felt her work was without effect, and allowed it to become so. For the former class there is nothing to say. To the latter I would recommend the conscientious following of an outline or schedule of work: not for the checking up of achievements, but because in the following of such an outline one loses the feverish unrest which comes in trying to grasp the whole of the problem at once, and finds that the daily round of work, faithfully performed and studied, furnishes a mass of data—a knowledge of conditions and needs, which leads directly to results.

Outline

- 1 Treatment Room Work
Methods: Few drugs. Show personal interest in every case. Instruction proper medical and surgical care
- 2 Visits throughout factory, covering every department frequently
 - a. Follow-up on cases seen in treatment room
 - b. Detection of incipient troubles
 - c. Ventilation—cleaning—safety
 - d. Orderliness and sanitation in toilets, lockers, etc.
 - e. (Most important) General effect—"On the Job"
- 3 Calls on sick or absentees
Not as spy, but as friend, a spirit always welcomed
- 4 Coöperation with doctors, clergy and outside interested parties
- 5 Help or advice in family troubles—medical, moral, social
- 6 Development of work in interest of employes: bank, library, lunch room, newspaper, benefit association
- 7 Outside social work in small groups
- 8 Coöperation in any work for civic betterment

Following such an outline furnishes plenty of occupation; occupation leads to a quiet mind; and it is only the quiet mind that can achieve. What use is to be made of all the various phases of human needs and peculiarities noted? Out of the knowledge and experi-

ence of the nurse, seeing the people in this new relationship, should come some valuable contributions towards the establishment of the much desired harmony. It seems to me that in looking for causes of disharmony our investigators are usually looking too far or too high. The causes of tremendous troubles are often very little things. Whole departments are upset by the ill-temper or arbitrary actions of one person—some little lack of consideration—perhaps partly justifiable. This is where the nurse fits in. She stands as the friend of the people; she sees things with their eyes; and then, because of her broader training and experience, and her wider viewpoint, she can often locate the festering spot that is the underlying cause of disturbance. She will stumble into things that show a great unfilled want in the lives of the people—things which may lead to the development of schemes to fill these needs—schemes bringing the employer and employe together and out of the development of which, greater mutual understanding is evolved.

THE DETAILS OF A DAY'S ROUTINE

Let us follow this outline a little way. The employes visiting the treatment room may number ten or one hundred a day (if the latter, the nurse needs an assistant from the start). Many of these cases will be minor accidents or infections. There may or may not be work to do in the investigation of the cause of the accident. It may be due to gross carelessness on the part of the injured person; it may be due to the nervousness produced by the over-arduous "boss"; it may be due to another's carelessness in leaving utensils in the way; it may be a defect in machinery. There, at any rate, is something to do in the line of instructions for proper surgical care—explanation of methods used—a little correction of the prevalent ideas as to the value of cobwebs or onions for surgical dressings. Some of our patients may have chronic disorders of stomach or head and seek a daily remedy. Such troubles may frequently be traced to neglected teeth, to eye strain, or to atrocious habits of diet, and it will take a long time to break down some of the traditions found in different industries and convince a man of the value of modern medical science. One has at times the worker who craves a stimulant to enable him to perform his task, and investigation shows a home condition that makes a night's rest impossible. I have had one employer, about to start elaborate "welfare work," say to me, "I don't

care anything about a man's sick babies or his outside affairs, I just want him well and happy here." That statement will not bear analysis, because it is doubtful if a man can be well and happy at his work if there are sick babies at home. And the nurse who follows every clue to a sick baby or other home conditions that affect the worker in the factory is fulfilling her highest obligation to her employer in his quest for well and happy employes.

The same thing applies to the hysterical or frequently ailing girl. Tragic things may be discovered in the life of the listless, uninterested factory girl. It is only fair to the management as well as humane to the girl to investigate these conditions, for the employer in the eyes of the world is usually bearing the blame. It is not enough even to locate the cause of the pallor and listlessness in the all-night dance. The good work is not ended until healthier pleasures and rational living are substituted; and it has been proven that the average girl can be made to see this from the health and the business standpoint. It was the frequent discovery of this condition in my recent work which led to the organization of a girls' club which met this need in the lives of over a hundred girls, and which furthermore taught them the principles of democracy, self-support and self-government. Does a girls' club seem remote from the employer's purpose in establishing a nurse in his factory? There is really a very close connection. More than one girl said in relation to her enjoyment of the club, "I have so much more to think about now. I can work better and the day goes faster." The day that goes fast is never a day of loafing.

The daily visits throughout the factory are a very essential feature of the work. Apart from the purpose of these trips as tabulated, they are absolutely necessary in order to produce a fellow-feeling. I do not know that the day will come when the man who sits in his office and wears his coat and his collar will cease to be an object of apparent disdain but real envy, among those honest people who labor with their hands. The nurse should early recognize this and let nothing interfere with a routine inspection of factory and workers. The management should grant this privilege and should give frequent opportunities for conferences with the nurse in relation to her findings or recommendations as to better sanitation or working conditions. Here, too, the nurse should be on her guard lest her suggestions lose force through a too strictly professional interpreta-

tion of hygiene. One cannot demand hospital standards of asepsis in a factory—nor is it at all necessary.

The nurse's attitude in the factory should be one of sympathy and interest, but she should always feel and give others the feeling that her highest duty to worker as well as to manager is to set a standard of better conditions—better health, and through these, to greater efficiency and value. This does not mean eliminating the weak in favor of the strong; neither on the other hand does it mean coddling the inefficient worker and concealing, because of a false standard of kindness, defects that must lead to incompetence. The nurse who accepts industrial work must accept it in its true meaning. She is not engaged to run an out-patient department for the handicapped. Her work is to develop high standards of health as a part of business efficiency, to see that all conditions are conducive to effecting this standard, and to inspire those for whom she is working with a zeal for these principles. It is astonishing to see how quickly the former habits of thought among the workers melt away when one labors in their midst, upheld by ideals of cleanliness of person, orderliness of rooms, courtesy of manner to each and every call, and a cheerful enduring energy, and love of work.

EQUIPMENT OF THE NURSE'S DEPARTMENT

The nurse's department should be located if possible in a part of the plant free from the jar of machinery, where good cross-ventilation is possible. She should have a private office for consultations or conferences with any who want to see her. There should be a separate room for treatments, the size of this directly varying with the number of employes and the hazard of the occupation. Hot and cold running water should be in this room and there should be space for a couch where an injured person could be placed. The rest room should be quite separate from these rooms. It should have one or two couches, preferably rattan, and the walls should be tinted in some quiet tone that is not glaring. It should not be overfurnished, unless it is intended for use as a recreation room, when cushions, books, pictures and rugs may well be utilized. Having in mind a room strictly for the care of the sick I would recommend the simplest furnishings, suggesting repose in every way.

In the equipment of a treatment room it is surprising how little is required, apart from the few surgical instruments necessary in

case of accident or infection and the antiseptic solutions needed in this kind of work. The use of medicines is to be tabooed as much as possible. The morbid craving of the people at large for drugs as a relief to symptoms is certainly not to be encouraged by the nurse who is working for public health, and who knows that healthy recreation, better air in factory and at home, digestible food, proper rest and relaxation of nervous strain, are the things the people need, and that if drugs *could* bring about the desired result it would be wrong to recommend them. Another thing that the nurse must guard against is the tendency of the people to discuss sickness and past operations. Let her watchword be health and not sickness, and she will have a much better and quicker response to her efforts.

While it is not possible for the nurse to be always present in her rooms, if devoting time to outside calls and factory inspection as well, she should make provision for the care of accident or illness by giving training in first aid to some available person in the factory and her emergency and rest rooms should be open at all times.

The calls on sick or absent employees will always lead to a feeling of personal interest, if rightly handled; in fact very soon it will be regarded as an affront not to receive a call from the nurse if absent from work. She will find it essential to have friendly relations with the local physicians and clergymen and all relief and charitable organizations. The details of family troubles cannot all be handled by the nurse, but through coöperation with other agencies much can be effected.

The greater the expectation of the ultimate benefit of this work, the slower must be the initial steps. All the welfare features in a factory should be the outgrowth of the people's obvious needs and should be developed *with* the people. It is only in this way that they can succeed. I have seen mahogany furnished, expensively equipped libraries unused. In my own work, a little library of eight hundred volumes was patronized by two hundred readers, and the coming and going daily was a pleasant feature of the personal intercourse between departments.

STARTING A SAVINGS BUREAU

The development of a savings bureau was undertaken with the knowledge of two existing conditions. First, we knew that money was not wisely handled by our people, that it was chiefly a hand-to-

mouth policy that governed their expenditures, with no provision for the rainy day. We also know that a few of the more thrifty-minded were saving when possible, placing this money with some trusted fellow-worker, whose bookkeeping was of a primitive order, memory playing a large part in the management of these funds. This was so obviously unsafe and yet had so much of good in it that we utilized these trusted people as a part of the force in the savings bureau, all moneys being collected by them in their several departments and turned in to the treasurer, who was elected by vote of the people. We followed the habit already established in connection with their own savings plan, and savings bureau collections were made in the wake of the paymaster—obviously the psychic moment. Withdrawals might be made at any time, within twenty-four hours' notice to the treasurer. Interest was computed semi-annually at $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. A loan department was developed in connection with the savings bureau, where money could be borrowed to the extent of the weekly salary, or larger amounts by giving collateral, the rate of interest being low. This was not intended to encourage the man who always lived ahead of his earnings, and the purpose of the loan had to be confided to some member of the loan committee. It was almost the invariable fact that the money so borrowed gave help that could not have been secured in any other way, in times of expensive illness at home, or when mortgage interest or taxes came due, or for the larger buying of winter fuel or supplies which enables the man with means to live so much more cheaply than his poorer brother.

When making the loan the borrower gave his written promise to make weekly deposits into the bureau until the sum borrowed, plus interest, should be accumulated. The entire transaction was on a business basis, and one could almost see self-respect grow as a man finally withdrew from his savings in the bureau the sum equal to his note and interest, and realized that without loss of dignity he had accomplished his ambitions and was clear from debt. The savings bureau apparently met another need. Before its start it was customary to hear from our girls, when vacation time was allotted, the rather bitter remark that a vacation without money did not mean much. This complaint entirely ceased; they all had money; it became the habit to save first, and it was almost without exception, on the withdrawal of money for whatever purpose, that the

statement was made, entirely unsolicited, "I would not have a cent of this money if it were not for this bank." At the close of the first year the total deposits for the year were approximately \$5,000. At the close of the fourth year, with some four hundred depositors, the figure reached nearly \$15,000, no one depositor having more than \$500, interest being paid at the prevailing rate. The company agreed to use the savings bureau money, to the extent of \$5,000, paying 5 per cent interest. Beyond this (apart from the money out on loans) it was invested by the executive board of the bureau.

ADVANTAGES OF A LUNCH ROOM

Whatever may be the response of a group of employes to certain features of welfare work, there is no question as to their response to the thought of a lunch room. If it be clean and attractive, if it serves good and plentiful food at reasonable prices, it will soon prove its need and there is no better means of reaching to the heart of the people (the avenue of the stomach has always been acknowledged as the straight road). The reasons for this particular development in our plant were: first, that one hundred people were eating cold lunches at noon; half as many more were taking a twenty-five minute walk to their homes for the purpose of getting a hot meal, which they had just ten minutes to eat. Numerous cases of after-lunch indigestion were due to this long hurried walk to and from home, which in the hot weather was extremely exhausting. The lunch room was planned with particular reference to serving an accessory to the lunch brought from home—a hot soup or cup of coffee, an attractive dessert or ice cream. A whole meal could be obtained, but the plan was not to entice people to spend their money; rather to make possible a nourishing noon repast at small cost.

This lunch room, equipped at a cash outlay of \$400 (which did not cover carpentry or plumbing) served a daily average of seventy-five people, and on rainy days its service was stretched to accommodate nearly two hundred. The room used was a deserted basement office, hardly twenty by twenty feet. A young girl was trained by the nurse to do the cooking in the most careful and sanitary manner. The service was entirely voluntary, the food being served at the noon hour by the employment manager, the nurse and several of the stenographers who cheerfully gave part of their noon hour in return for the lunch. This voluntary service proved a very helpful factor

in furthering the democratic spirit which we wished for. It is hard to imagine any ulterior motive in one who, voluntarily and cheerfully, serves you hot soup over a counter daily. There was evidently something in the quality of this service which won the confidence of our people as no other effort had done. We felt that if hired help had been depended on in this service, or in the management of the lunch room, much would have been lost. We demonstrated that given the rent, light and gas, a lunch room of this capacity could maintain itself without loss, covering the cost of food and of cooking and cleaning. The responsibility for the running of the lunch room was shared with the people by making one person in each department responsible for the sale of the checks which were taken in payment for the food, no money being handled in the lunch room.

The development of welfare features will vary with the number of employes and the wealth of the corporation, but where there is a group of even one hundred employes, the work will repay the effort put into it, in loyalty and good-fellowship. I know nothing of its dollar and cents value and believe it could not be estimated. In the smallest developments, the system should be so complete and so thorough that it may be stretched to meet growing requirements.

Records should be kept, showing the length of service of each worker, the cause of his visits to the nurse, frequency of such visits, remedies, follow-up work, home visits, etc. Notes should also be made as to nationality, citizenship, standing in community, and interrelations with other workers. Such records will, in the course of time, give some valuable statistics in the comparison of departments, from the health viewpoint, and are further absolutely essential in order to keep in touch with the worker, as one cannot rely upon memory.

From the standpoint of the nurse, the work in an industrial plant has in it all the elements which make up a satisfying occupation. It deals not alone with the details of the moment, a routine filling every hour, nor alone with a large problem, out of the study of which one hopes to produce statistics and data which will aid in its solution, but it embodies both these conditions. The routine and daily work would be wasted in the long run were they not part of the study of the larger problem. The attempt to study this problem would be unsuccessful were not many methods devised for get-

ting close to the people—not only to serve their needs, but to see things with their eyes.

The work brings up all the conditions that relate to public health or social service work of any nature. From the outlook of public health the best reason for work inside a factory, in its value to the community, is because there one finds and can strike at the root of evils which are powerful in undermining health, and which are the target of the efforts of hospital clinics and social workers. The proper structure and care of toilets is closely allied to the work of the medical profession in finding the causes and cures of venereal disease, the destructive effects of which on innocent victims are daily shown in hospitals and clinics. The careful washing and sweeping of floors in industries where poisonous dusts accumulate is an effort in harmony with that branch of medicine which is seeking to prevent occupational disease.

It is therefore a work which is educational to the employer as well as the employed. I feel that when an employer has awakened so far as to realize that the force which turns out his product is composed of *people*—not machines or power, or money—but human beings like himself, this education has commenced. It is broadened when conditions affecting these people are brought to him again and again, and he sees that their point of view is the same as his would be, could places be changed. If still further he realizes that what affects the people to their detriment must, in its widening circle, affect the community, and ultimately, like a boomerang his own prospects, he will finally see that the first and last analysis reads very much like the old-fashioned golden rule. He will find then too, perhaps to his surprise, that he is one of the forces working for the public weal, when he had only intended to “keep his employes happy.”

When our industries have recognized their responsibility for the human lives in their employ, and by compelling health and efficiency have raised the standards of the working people, there will be fewer derelicts to cast on the mercies of hospitals and charitable societies.